

Shinewater Park, Eastbourne, East Sussex, 1995

A preliminary assessment of the pottery
assemblage

by
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A preliminary assessment of the pottery assemblage

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The size of the assemblage

The pottery assemblage currently recovered from Shinewater Park is relatively small. However, with the exception of Mile Oak (Hamilton 2002a), it is the largest extant Late Bronze Age pottery assemblage from Sussex, both in terms of weight and sherd numbers. It is also larger than key type assemblages from south-central Britain such as Eldon's Seat (Cunliffe and Phillipson 1978). The Shinewater assemblage comprises 1850 sherds, weighing a total of c. 23kg. The Mile Oak assemblage (c. 9000 sherds, weighing 47kg) is mostly from topsoil, is very eroded, and has produced only a minor number of diagnostic form or decorated sherds. The East Sussex settlement of Bishopstone (Bell 1977; Hamilton 1993) potentially has a substantial Late Bronze Age assemblage, but its fragmentary nature, together with the continuity of its Late Bronze Age fabric types into the Early Iron Age, makes assessment of the scale and nature of the assemblage difficult to assess. The largest *stratified* Late Bronze Age Sussex assemblages are those from the hillforts of Chanctonbury Ring, and Harting Beacon (Hamilton 1979; 1980; 1993). Each of these assemblages comprise c. 1300 sherds, but both assemblages comprise small sherds and in each case the total number of vessels represented is small. More Late Bronze Age vessel types, including some forms not previously identified in Sussex, are present in the current Shinewater assemblage than in any other Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblage.

Depositional processes

The Shinewater pottery has a high average weight per sherd. Sherd breaks are quite sharp and there is a high proportion of relatively complete vessels. This collectively suggests a situation of site abandonment and/or artefact disposal which involved leaving functioning material culture *in situ*, and/or accumulating rubbish in 'protected' areas. This is in contrast with the practice of rubbish collection and reworking which is evidenced

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in other Sussex Late Bronze Age pottery assemblages, for example hillfort assemblages.

The condition of the pottery

The surface of the pottery is generally well preserved. Although burnished surfaces are differentially eroded, details of surface smoothing and clay modelling (e.g. fingering impressions) are finely preserved. The assemblage therefore has potential for comprehensive technological analysis. Several sherds show signs of being re-fired, suggesting on-site pyrotechnological activities relating perhaps to metalworking, or pottery firing.

Dating and contemporary Sussex assemblages

Two thirds of the extant Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblages are dated to the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (Hamilton 1993). The Shinewater Park pottery falls towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, which is less well represented in Sussex, but includes assemblages from the hillforts/enclosures of Harting Beacon, Chanctonbury Ring, the Trundle, Castlehill Newhaven, and Highdown Hill (Hamilton 1993). On stylistic grounds, the Shinewater pottery is interpreted as coming from a single broad-phase of site activity dating to the 9th/8th centuries BC (see below).

In total, Sussex has less than twenty-five Late Bronze Age assemblages. The greater part of these are from West Sussex. The geographic location of Shinewater in East Sussex is of some importance for the consideration of the nature of early first millennium BC pottery traditions, and contacts, in the east of the county. Many of Sussex's Late Bronze Age assemblages are of poor stratigraphic quality, being surface collections, or residual finds associated with later assemblages (e.g. Carne's Seat, Hamilton 1986; Kingston Buci, and Selsey, Hamilton 1993). Others relate to single pit groups (West Blatchington, Hamilton 1993, Norris and Burstow 1952; Rustington site B, Hamilton 1990; Yapton, Hamilton 1987; Knapp Farm, Hamilton 1997). Small *stratified* Late Bronze Age assemblages have been recovered from hillforts (e.g. Harting Beacon, Chanctonbury, and Thundersbarrow Hill, Hamilton 1979; 1980; 1993) and settlements (Downsview, Hamilton 2002b; Varley Halls, Hamilton 1997; Plumpton Plain B, Hawkes 1939). The potential to extract a large, stratified, *in situ*, single-phase assemblage from possible future excavations at Shinewater is therefore highly valuable to our assessment of southern British regional ceramic traditions. Given that Late Bronze Age ceramics are characterised by their use in a wide range of social and domestic activities (Barrett 1980), such an assemblage would significantly contribute to our regional understanding of Late Bronze Age social practices and site specializations.

Vessel types and decoration

Shinewater has a preponderance of shouldered vessels (Figures 1–10). Approximately 4% of all sherds have evidence of decoration. The plain, convex jars and hemispherical bowls, which are present in several Sussex earlier Late Bronze Age assemblages (e.g. Yapton and Thundersbarrow Hill) are largely absent. Both bowls and jars are present in the Shinewater

assemblage and these occur in a wide range of volume sizes and fabric quality (cf. Figures 8 and 9). The extent of this range indicates that the pottery is likely to reflect a diverse range of on-site activities. Forms include medium-sized concave-necked shouldered jars, sometimes with finger-impressed or finger-nail-impressed decorated rims (this decoration occurs variously on top, inside, and outside of the rims) (Figure 6). The shoulders of these jars are usually undecorated. Another recurrent form is thick-walled tripartite jars with squared rims, finger-impressed shoulders and applied, finger-impressed cordons at the neck angle (Figures 7 and 8). The latter are uncommon in Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblages and distinctive of later Late Bronze Age assemblages from the Thames Valley, notably Mucking South Rings (Jones and Bond 1980), together with eastern British sites such as Minnis Bay, Kent (Worsfold 1943) and West Harling, Norfolk (Clark and Fell 1953). The Shinewater medium-coarse wares include smaller round-shouldered jars and bowls with short necks and thin, slightly out-turned rims. These wares are often burnished and are sometimes delicately decorated with finger-nail-impressed shoulders and/or cable-impressed rims. Bases are mostly flat and in several examples evidence having been made in one piece from a flattened ball of clay. Several bases have finely gritted undersides, which is a characteristic of many lowland British Late Bronze Age assemblages. One slight omphalos type base is present, another Late Bronze Age type. One base has been modelled to produce a slight foot-ring (Figure 11), this being a feature more commonly associated with Early Iron Age assemblages.

The most distinctive decoration is on the thin-walled bowls. Particularly distinctive is the use of combing below the shoulder angle of a vessel to produced wavy lines or arcades. The decoration is particularly associated with a single, shouldered bowl, with a bead rim and this vessel additionally has vertical combed lines above the shoulder (Figure 10). Bead-rim bowls appear towards the end of Late Bronze Age. The Shinewater example compares with comb-, and incised-decorated bowls from the Thames Valley, specifically examples from Runnymede, Surrey (Longley 1980), Mucking, Essex (Jones and Bond 1980), Yiewsley, Greater London (Needham 1987)), and Rams Hill, Berkshire (Bradley and Ellison 1975).

Fabrics

Virtually all of the assemblage is flint-gritted. Most of the flint-gritting is 'calcined' grey/white in colour and likely has been prepared by fire-heating and subsequent breaking down by hammering. Interestingly, a small proportion of the flint is black/brown in colour, rounded and polished. The latter grits appear to be natural to the potting clay and suggest the use of alluvial or riverine clays. This is perhaps confirmed by the occasional presence of calcareous inclusions, specifically suggesting some use of calcareous alluvial clays. The fine wares are distinguished by smaller flint grits (sometimes less abundant), smoothed or burnished surface finishes, and thin walls. The absence of iron-oxide rich fabrics makes the Shinewater fabrics distinctively different to other mid and East Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblages (Hamilton 1980; 1993).

The distinctive bead-rim bowl with comb-incised decoration, is of a gritless, silty fabric with occasional mica specks. This fabric is exceptional within the Shinewater assemblage and certainly merits further analysis, given the distinctiveness of the bowl form and decoration with which it is associated.

It is possible that it is a fine ware import, possibly from the continent (where it has compares with forms in Northern France, specifically from Choisy la Bac, Oise). Equally, it may have been manufactured in a Thames Valley location, given that the Shinewater assemblage has more in common with sites such as Runnymede than with other Sussex Late Bronze Age assemblages. Also of interest are two, medium-flint-gritted rim sherds from a lid or an assiette sub-tronconique of continental, Hallstatt type; either form is very rare in British contexts.

Conclusion

The Shinewater assemblage has a preserved condition, a contextual quality, and potential scale and variability, that it is capable of resolving broad-based issues of social practice, site use and site formation processes apposite to the southern British Late Bronze Age. For southern Britain, it would provides the first substantial large-scale assemblage from the end of the Late Bronze Age. Its size and style-range is exceptional for Sussex. The assemblage additionally has potential for establishing the existence of coastal links with a Thames Valley axis, and indeed raises the possibility of continental links and ceramic imports.

Given that current archaeological research needs to better define the nature of Late Bronze Age craft specialization (e.g. the increasing importance of specialist ceramic production), and changes in pyrotechnology (relating to ceramics and the increasing adoption of iron), the future recovery of a comprehensive stratified ceramic assemblage from Shinewater is of particular importance.

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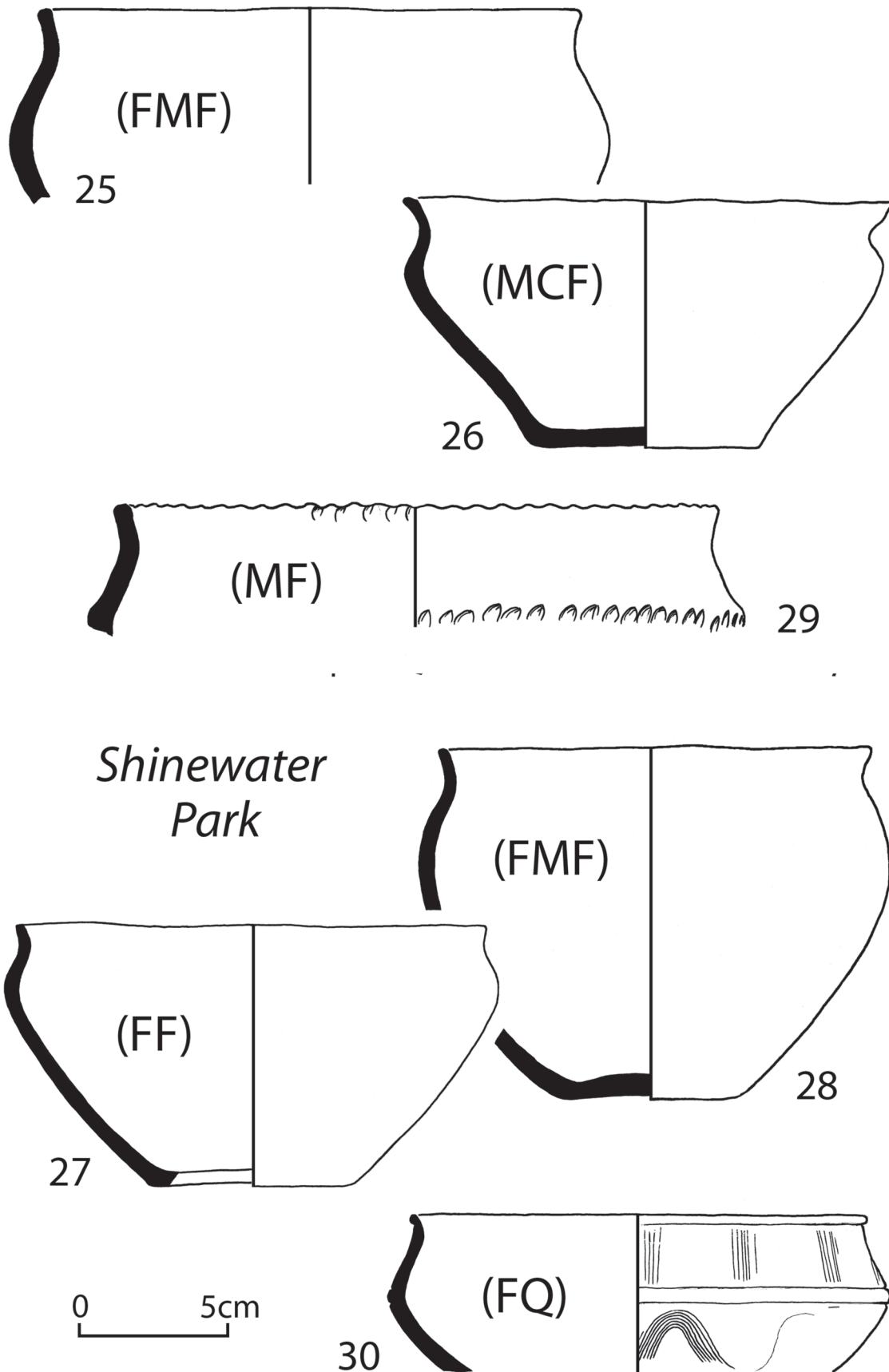


Figure 1

Late Bronze Age (LBA) pottery from Shinewater Park, Eastbourne. 27–30, finely burnished. *After* Seager Thomas 2008, fig. 8



Figure 2

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Undecorated rim and shoulder of shouldered jar (Fig. 1.25, opposite)



Figure 3

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Decorated rim and shoulder of shouldered jar (Fig. 1.29, opposite). *Full size*



Figure 4

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Near whole, roughly finished LBA shouldered bowl (Fig. 1.26). *Full size*



Figure 5

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Interior of Figure 4, above



Figure 6

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Internally decorated rim of shouldered jar



Figure 7

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Decorated rim and shoulder of shouldered jar



Figure 8

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Decorated shoulder of very large shouldered jar



Figure 9

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Very small decorated shouldered jar



Figure 10

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Decorated fineware bowl



Figure 11

LBA pottery from Shinewater Park. Base





